

**Speech to Executives of Mervyn's and Target Companies**  
**by California Arts Council Director Barry Hessenius**  
**October 1, 2003**

I would like to thank Mervyn's and Target stores, Bernard Boudreaux and his excellent staff and all of the executives from the Target Corporation for their extraordinary commitment and support for arts, culture and creativity in California.

While we have all been players in an unprecedented nadir in the cycle of support for the arts in our state over the past two years, a tragic situation with dire consequences that has left us all feeling marginalized and impotent, I would like to talk to you tonight about Power - the power of the arts to inspire; the power of the arts to change lives; the power of the arts to create jobs, to boost tourism, to add to the economic upside, to enable companies to attain a global advantage; the power of the arts to transform blighted, all but abandoned downtown corridors into vibrant city centers; the power of the arts to improve the learning of our children, to better prepare them for the new century; **the power of the arts to instill**

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**self-esteem and a sense of purpose** in countless kids who have otherwise given up; the power of the arts to give new purpose to seniors; the power of the arts to heal; the power of the arts add beauty to our lives. The power of the arts is virtually boundless and we haven't yet to even begin to tap into the limitless benefits arts, culture and creativity might add to our lives. We need to understand and recognize, then

embrace and talk about, just how powerful what we do is, and how powerful we really are. We need to use that power - think outside the box, marshal power and take back our own future. It's up to you.

When I heard President's Bush's request for \$87 billion for the effort in Iraq, I couldn't help but imagine what kind of world this might be if one year \$87 billion was spent to advance arts and creativity on a global basis. Just think for a moment what impact that might have across this planet.

I want to talk to you tonight about the Power you have. There are an estimated 10,000 arts organizations in this state. There are probably 250,000 people who are directly connected to those organizations - as staff, board members, volunteers. There are doubtless ten times that number that make up the audiences and clients of those organizations. If even a fraction of all of those people can be organized to work towards a better understanding and appreciation of the value of the arts, there is nothing we can't achieve. You have power - far more than you realize - the power to influence elected officials, indeed, the power to elect people to office, the power to change media coverage of

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what we do, the power to engage the public and motivate them to support what we do, the power to raise vast sums of money to support lobbying efforts and compete in the political arena - On this last point if arts organizations and artists will do benefits - one per organization per year - we could raise \$5 million a year in California alone. Across the nation, the arts could - should - become one of the most powerful forces in American politics. And we ought to do that - now - so that those who follow us in the future won't have

to spend increasing amounts of their time defending their existence - but might spend their time creating. Power lies dormant unless it is exercised.

## The arts have the power to make us think.

You have the power to collaborate, to cooperate - to forge alliances that will, once and for all, move the arts from being the province of the East

Wing of the White House - from being a social adjunct of the First Lady - from the sexist, condescending and patronizing relegation of arts as "women's work", to being a policy tool of the West Wing - an economic, trade, education, health, and international policy tool for global and local change - real "women's work". And you have the power to insure that the arts become a policy tool in every state house and in every city hall. It matters not whether this profound sea-change shift comes from Washington DC downward or from Main Street upward. You have the power to make it happen. You have the power to start initiatives, create new structures, advance new coalitions. You have the power to increase the public's understanding and appreciation of your value; to market yourselves and services; to make the case for your worth. Your power is real and lies waiting for you to tap into it. Your power stems from your numbers, from working together for your own common self-interest. Your power stems from the public's tacit understanding that the arts are important, are meaningful, are critical. Your power stems from the benefit you bring to your communities. Your power stems from your determination to use it. You have the power, but you must use it.

And on a daily basis, in the work each of you do, you have the power to impact individual lives - thousands, millions of individual lives - to make them better. What you do every day matters. In many ways, what you do matters more than what legislators do, matters more than what pundits say, what the media thinks matters. The way you touch lives matters more than Supreme Court decisions, and recall elections, and UN debates, for you are the ones in the trenches, on the front line - you are the ones who can turn around disaffected young people who think they have no future, you are the ones who give people with little time left in their lives new purpose and meaning, you are the ones who can provoke thought and reflection, who can mine laughter and tears, joy and outrage, contemplation and hope. The arts have the power to make us think - and too often this world seems to have relegated the importance of thought far behind the importance of fame.

This year the California Arts Council must re-invent itself. We have suffered a 94% cut in our budget. We now rank dead last in per capita support at less than three cents per citizen. That is an embarrassment in a state where creativity is our number one asset. Our purpose this year is to help empower you so that you might use the power you already have. We shall try to empower you by helping you to organize, by helping you to communicate, by providing you with training, and tools to exercise your power to improve your lot. We shall empower you by supporting your efforts to become more effective in securing the public and private support you need. And we shall stand at your side and behind you to bolster your spirits, your resolve, your commitment. We shall remind you of your responsibility as citizens of the arts field to devote some of your energies as good arts

citizens to the benefit of the whole of the arts beyond your own organization and world. We shall remind you too of what might be.

Three years ago I gave a speech where I talked about a dream of \$100 million in state support for the arts. I still have that dream. \$100 million is one tenth of one percent of the state budget. I still believe we can get there - it might take a ballot initiative to do it - it will certainly take a concerted, massive cooperative effort, it will certainly take some sacrifice and dedication by everyone in the field, at a time when no one has any time, but somehow, some way I know that small amount is possible. And that could be the beginning of the change in everything we have done and will do.

Tonight we celebrate - your accomplishments, and the bright hope you bring to your communities. Tonight we remember not just how far we have to go, but how far we have come. Tonight we look around and marvel at the quality, the reach, the impact of what we are already doing.

So tonight I salute you - I salute your power to change things. And I celebrate with you your victories, for even if you don't see those victories every day, I assure you they are yours - with an impact far beyond what you might imagine. I remind you of your power and urge you to use it.

And I remind you that no matter what, no matter how bleak things might be, please, whatever you do, Don't Quit.

Thank you.